DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 473 187 CE 084 432

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TITLE	The White Paper on Adult Education: Learning For Life. Synopsis, Analysis of Recommendations, Issues for AONTAS.
INSTITUTION	Irish National Association of Adult Education, Dublin.
PUB DATE	2000-08-00
NOTE	45p.; For the complete White Paper, see CE 082 696.
AVAILABLE FROM	For full text: http://www.aontas.com/resources/pdf/analysis.pdf.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Evaluative (142)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Adult Education; Adult Educators; *Adult Learning; Adult Literacy; Adult Programs; Adult Students; Colleges; *Community Education; Continuing Education; Definitions; Distance Education; Education Work Relationship; Educational Planning; *Educational Policy; Educational Research; Educational Technology; *Finance Reform; Financial Support; Foreign Countries; *Lifelong Learning; *Literacy Education; National Programs; Partnerships in Education; Position Papers; Postsecondary Education; Program Evaluation; School Community Relationship; Student Evaluation; Universities; Workplace Literacy
IDENTIFIERS	*Ireland; Learning Organizations; Work Based Learning

ABSTRACT

The issues facing the following areas of adult education in Ireland in the era of lifelong learning were examined in a white paper: (1) second chance and further education; (2) community education; (3) workplace education; and (4) higher education. The Irish National Association of Adult Education (AONTAS) analyzed the recommendations presented in the white paper. Although AONTAS generally welcomed the changes in Ireland's adult education system that are outlined in the white paper, it did express specific concerns about several proposals. The following were among AONTAS' specific policy recommendations: (1) limiting the proposal regarding lowering the pupil-teacher ratio to literacy programs could lead to a proliferation of provision at the foundation level with a lack of supported programs after completion of the foundation program; (2) program fees should be abolished not just for the most disadvantaged adults but for all adult learners; (3) because low-skill workers will still be a marginalized group under the proposals outlined in the white paper, measures must be put in place to ensure that they can avail themselves of the opportunities necessary for success in a high-skilled, knowledge-based economy; (4) only the complete abolition of student fees can remove the confusion regarding entitlement to free fees and protect the interests of all adult learners. (MN)

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THE WHITE PAPER ON ADULT EDUCATION:

LEARNING FOR LIFE

AONTAS

SYNOPSIS, ANALYSIS OF RECOMMENDATIONS, ISSUES FOR AONTAS.

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Second Chance and Further Education Programme

The White Paper prioritises four areas for development as part of a National Second Chance and further Education Programme. These are described below.

National Adult Literacy Programme

There have been a number of developments with regard to the Literacy Service since the publication of the Green Paper. These include funding of £73.7m allocated in the National Development Plan, the development of pilot initiatives with industry to combine work and literacy provision, the development of new outreach strategies and flexible delivery mechanisms and the establishment of an Interdepartmental Group on Literacy and the Unemployed.

Given the extent of the Literacy problem in Ireland, where 25% of the population have less than Level 1 standard of literacy and 53% in total have less than Level 3 standard, combined with the negative implications for a person and their families, the Government is establishing the national Adult Literacy Programme. The Programme has a number of aims, which include:

- Engage 113,000 clients by the end of the National Development Plan funding period (2006)
- Prioritise those with the lowest levels of literacy
- Implement a quality framework to evaluate the programme
- Develop mechanisms for targeted intervention, particularly the use of referral networks. The under-representation of men is particularly noted
- Combine literacy training with other programmes, particularly Community Employment and FAS Bridging Training Measures. This will allow agencies to combine resources locally to best address emerging needs
- Adopt NALA's Consortia Framework
- Explore the potential of ICT and broadcasting in the development of provision
- Expand provision for workplace literacy
- Increase collaboration with the public library service
- Increase collaboration with other agencies to target groups such as farmers.

In terms of the payment of allowances, the following steps will be taken:

- Combinations of schemes will be used to optimum effect to allow for the payment of training allowances to participants on literacy programmes
- Adult basic education programmes and/or literacy programmes of a duration of at least 19.5 hrs per week will be treated as full-time for entitlement to a continued welfare payment
- The DSCFA will examine participation in part-time programmes in relation to retention of welfare payments to optimise on the opportunity for participants to improve skills and, ultimately, to secure lasting employment

- An integrated inter-departmental approach will be taken to the payment of allowances and means testing for secondary benefits across education, training and welfare programmes. No changes will be implemented without consultation with all departments involved.

AONTAS believes that these measures will enable more people to access literacy provision, while retaining the confidentiality that is so important to them. We particularly welcome the adoption of an interdepartmental approach to benefit/allowance payments and the development of strategies for the future. This should ensure that many more people avail of literacy provision without concern to the protection of the family income. The use of broadcast media as an initial step in addressing literacy difficulties is innovative and should lead to increased confidence on the part of the participant to seek further assistance in combating their literacy problems.

With regard to literacy within schools, AONTAS welcomes the establishment of the National Reading Initiative, funded under the National Development Plan. By linking with the adult literacy service and developing family literacy schemes, future difficulties with regard to literacy should be greatly reduced in society.

The commitment to conduct a National Literacy Survey in 2003 and at regular intervals thereafter should also assist greatly in the monitoring of Programme and in ensuring its responsiveness as the national situation changes. Linking it, where possible, to future OECD studies should also assist in the development and transfer of best practice on an international level.

The Back to Education Initiative

This initiative seeks to target an additional 20,000 early school leavers and adults annually in the period up to 2006 and £1.027bn has been allocated for its implementation in the National Development Plan.

The BTEI will provide for entry at a number of levels:

- NCVA Foundation level, the Junior Certificate or their equivalents for those who have no prior educational qualifications and/or those progressing from the literacy service
- NCVA Level 1, the Leaving Certificate or their equivalents for those who have completed lower second-level education
- NCVA Level 2 or 3 for those who have completed upper second level or who are in a position to complete a programme at this level. Key priorities in this level will be the provision of ICT, engineering and e-commerce training, the development of foreign language proficiency and the provision of childcare training.

In order to address these needs, the BTEI will provide an improvement in the pupil teacher ration to 10:1 for all participants accessing the programme with

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less than upper second level education. This will be conditional on providers complying with a number of conditions, such as a process of learner engagement, demonstrating linkages, providing access to national certification and complying with monitoring and evaluation procedures.

AONTAS has highlighted the necessity of ensuring progression routes, particularly for those progressing from literacy provision, and is pleased to see that its comments in this regard have been taken on board.

We have concerns, however, on the lowering of the pupil teacher ratio for this group only, and are fearful that this could lead to a proliferation of provision at foundation level with a lack of supported progression options on completion of the foundation programme. The recent study, *College Knowledge* (Fleming and Murphy; NUI Maynooth; 1998) demonstrated the need for sustained support post-progression and indicated that a lack of such support can lead to non-completion of the next phase of education. This would certainly not be a desirable outcome for either the participant or the adult education system. AONTAS believes that the ratio should be retained at Level 1 in order to raise the confidence levels of participants sufficiently to cope with the change at Levels 2 and 3.

Four general categories of participant will be provided for under the Back to Education Initiative:

1. Youthreach/Traveller/VTOS eligible on full-time courses will be given free tuition and a training allowance or welfare payment
2. Other means-tested welfare or unemployment payment recipients and their dependants and Youthreach/Traveller/VTOS eligible on part-time courses will receive free tuition but will have to satisfy the criteria of the DSCFA in relation to retention of their payment For Youthreach/Traveller participants on part-time courses who may not have a welfare entitlement, the DES will pay a pro-rata training allowance
3. Other unwaged participants with less than upper second level education who are not covered by categories 1 and 2 will only pay 30% of tuition costs
4. Fees will be charged for all others.

While welcoming the opening-up of non-fee paying categories and the targeting of resources at the most disadvantaged, AONTAS is disappointed that our calls, and those of many others, in relation to the total abolition of fees for adult learners was not heeded. Retention of fees remains the single largest disparity between school leavers advancing their education and those adults who wish to return to education. AONTAS believes that the economy can support the investment in the adult population in this regard, given that the National Debt has been so greatly reduced and that the economy is particularly buoyant. The fact that labour shortages must be addressed if the position is to remain constant

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is a very good reason to invest in the adult population to the same level as the younger population. Very many of these people were failed by the system which now discriminates against them.

The use of the medical card as a criterion for free tuition is welcome, but AONTAS questions the effect this will have in allowing low paid, low skilled workers to benefit from the Back to Education Initiative. The minimum wage was introduced by the Government earlier this year to ensure a basic income for all workers. A single person working a 40 hour week and receiving the minimum wage will earn £176. The income threshold in relation to the medical card is £93 for someone in rented or private accommodation and £83 for a person living at home. Even with income disregards in terms of travel to work and household outgoings, AONTAS believe that many will no longer qualify for a medical card. If this scheme is to have effect, the thresholds for the medical card will need to be raised in line with the minimum wage. AONTAS believes that this should be addressed as a priority.

Furthermore, for those in category 3 (unwaged with less than upper second level education), a reduction to 30% of tuition may still put the cost of education out of the reach, depending on the level of the tuition fee charged. Many pensioners and women in the home could find this cost prohibitive.

Finally, AONTAS would like clarification on the charging of registration fees as an addition to tuition fees payable. When fees were abolished at third level for full-time programmes, colleges supplemented their income with an annual registration fee of £250. This has increased annually. Is the government proposing that registration fees be paid by the participant? If so, how will the level be assessed and will it vary depending on the programme engaged in and the nature of the institution/group providing it? AONTAS believes that regulations must be put in place to guard against such a move. If registration fees are to be payable, they should certainly not be at a level where they would militate against the uptake of a programme by any individual.

AONTAS is pleased that the impact of fees charged under the BTEI will be monitored. We believe this will highlight that fee payment is a barrier to participation and consider that the government should waive fees unilaterally at the earliest possible date.

National Adult Basic ICT Skills Programme

This initiative is to be established under the BTEI. The main elements will include:

- A national programme of ICT training up to and including NCVA Level 2 standard, to cater for the four categories of student outlined in the BTEI criteria.

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- Technical support for adult education providers to enable them to maintain, upgrade and network their ICT facilities
- Appropriate support to ensure that, where premises are used outside school hours for adult education programmes, the ICT facilities will be reset at the end of class to ensure they are available for ready use for the daytime work of the school
- Complimentary staff development and support arrangements

AONTAS welcomes this far-reaching initiative as an innovation for the adult education sector. Courses in ICT are in increasing demand by the adult population, but many do not have access to computer equipment to enable them to pursue their learning. Provision of equipment and allocation of staff to maintain it and support tutors is a very welcome step. AONTAS believes that this will enhance both provision and learning opportunities.

Educational Broadcasting

The National Adult Learning Council, the Department of Public Enterprise and the RTE Authority are to convene a Taskforce on Broadcasting and Education. They are to assess the resource implications of a comprehensive educational broadcasting service and identify sources of funding for it. They are also to examine the establishment of a pool of educationalists who have the necessary skills to work with broadcasting professionals in translating educational materials into a format suitable for broadcasting. It is intended that such a service would expand options in areas such as ICT, language, literacy and parenting. The importance of accessing certification for these initiatives is referred to and the National Qualifications Framework is cited in this regard.

AONTAS believes that the development of broadcasting service in the field of education would be an excellent method of widening access to basic education opportunities and enhancing distance education provision. Its ease of availability to people is of particular importance. AONTAS would be interested in participating in the Taskforce as outlined in the White Paper and in developing this initiative further.

Self-Funded, Part-Time Adult Education

The White Paper recognises the input made by the schools sector in the provision of adult education to date. It also recognises the need to develop this sector in terms of structure and organisation if provision is to be optimised.

It is therefore proposed to:

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1. Abolish the self-financing principle for those categories outlined in the BTEI. This is set to be of particular benefit to rural schools who found it difficult to fund provision in the past.
2. Extend the current ASTI/JMB pilot start-up scheme to the Community and Comprehensive and VEC schools sectors. This will entail a once-off start-up grant of £5,000 being paid to schools that have not previously offered adult education classes. It can be used to provide equipment and materials, staff development, accommodation of classes, advertising, administration and fees waivers in cases of hardship. The available fund will rise to £160,000 p.a. on a phased basis to allow for optimum inclusion of schools.
3. Allocate additional teaching hours where necessary to compensate day schools for posts of responsibility awarded in respect of night students
4. Promote a fees structure to allow for costs associated with the delivery of the service to be met. Some of this income will be borne by the Department through application of the BTEI structures for fee payment, other costs will be borne by fee paying learners.
5. Pay an additional allowance to principals providing part-time, mainly self-funded adult education programmes.
6. Designate a Director of Adult Education in each school offering a part-time mainly self-funded programme of at least 1500 enrolment hours. There is also provision to appoint further staff, including an assistant director and special duty posts as the size of the programme grows.
7. Schools and VECs will retain any surplus fee income remaining after operational costs are met for reinvestment in adult education. Accounting and tracking procedures will be put in place in consultation with management.

AONTAS has called for the abolition of the self-financing rule over many years and therefore welcomes this proposal. This should certainly lead to greater provision, although AONTAS still has concerns about the payment of fees by learners as referred to earlier in this text. There is also a concern that schools need to recoup at least 130% of the costs associated with running their programme from fee income. Although the department will bear the costs associated with those who qualify under that BTEI, AONTAS is concerned that the schools may be forced to charge higher fees than at present to non-BTEI participants in order to meet their costs. This would certainly be a regressive step and the situation should be monitored, as with the BTEI, to ensure that it does not become prohibitive for either provider or learner.

Generally, AONTAS is pleased with the measures to be incorporated in the Schools sector. They have made a valuable contribution to the advancement of education in the community and have been under-resourced in terms of finance, personnel and support services. Further measures in this regard are to be dealt with at a later stage.

Capital

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A capital fund will be established which will rise to a level of £10m p.a. over a phased basis. The fund will be used to:

- Build in areas where no suitable premises exist and where rented accommodation is not available
- Adapt premises to cater for students with disabilities and to comply with health and safety regulations
- Invest in ICT equipment, networking and upgrades
- Purchase of additional facilities for adult education use
- Development of educational multiplexes and adult education centres in line with local need

In addition, new school buildings will be adult learner proofed to ensure their suitability for that purpose and insurance arrangements will be put in place to ensure that cover is available for use in the evenings and at weekends, etc. The Department will also provide for supports for the BTEI by granting pro-rata funding for tuition, materials, advertising, caretaking, heat and light, general overheads, technician support and other educational aids. Priorities for investment from the fund will be dictated by a review based on compliance with general criteria.

Where centres are currently being rented, rental-purchase agreements are to be explored by the provider in question. Deeds of trust will be required where the Department invests in the refurbishment of rented premises. Each Local Adult Learning Board (LALB) will be asked to compile a directory of premises that are suitable and available for adult and community education in their area.

AONTAS believes that the development of a capital fund will lead to a rise in the quality of the learning environment for learners and take undue pressure off providers, particularly providers of community education. The move to encourage rental purchase agreements will certainly enhance the opportunities of core-funded community education and other providers in relation to acquiring long-term accommodation suited to their needs. AONTAS has highlighted the need for a capital budget on many occasions and finds its inclusion particularly welcome. We would, however, like clarification on the rate of implementation of the phased fund as we believe that demands on this resource will be high.

Review of the PLC Sector

AONTAS welcomes the review of the PLC sector and its emphasis on supports for staff and learners in the sector. This review should be carried out as a matter of urgency.

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Community Education

The White Paper acknowledges the enormous work of the Community Education sector in enabling participation, pioneering new approaches and adopting a truly needs-based approach to provision, with the learner at the centre of the experience. It also recognises the centrality of the Community Based Women's Groups within this process.

The role of AONTAS in assisting the development of these groups is also cited, although the extent to which AONTAS has worked with the groups is not fully recognised. Far from providing occasional support, AONTAS is recognised by the Women's Networks as the only organisation to have provided consistent support and development programmes to them since the early nineties.

The Government states its commitment to supporting the sector in a manner that reflects its importance. It is also concerned to protect those aspects of the Community Education ethos that are innovative and responsive despite the formalisation of systems likely to occur as a result of the implementation of the White Paper proposals.

Thirty-five Community Education Facilitators will be appointed to resource the sector. Thirty-three of them will be located within the Local Adult Learning Board structures and two will operate at National level in the Community Education Technical Support Unit. The role of the Local Community Education Facilitators will be to:

- Promote the development and nurturing of new community based learning groups
- Provide support to new and existing community groups in the form of technical, administrative and educational inputs
- Develop and encourage partnerships and links with statutory and other providers
- Promote the role of the sector in supporting outreach and referral to the statutory sector
- Liaise on accreditation and certification issues
- Help community education interests to access funding
- Network groups, both nationally and locally, supporting their participation in community fora, and facilitating a co-ordinated input from the sector into the work of the Local Adult Learning Boards and the County/City Development Boards
- Share good-practice from the sector and support the mainstreaming of relevant lessons into national policy and practice
- Report to the Local Adult Learning Boards on developments and provision and inform the work of the National Adult Leaning Council

The White Paper further states that the Community Education Facilitators will be required to demonstrate a deep-rooted knowledge of the community they serve and a clear understanding and empathy with the philosophy and processes of community education. *AONTAS believes that this would be crucial to the success of this initiative at local level.*

A Technical Support Unit will be established at national level to co-ordinate, monitor and assist the work of the Community Education Facilitators. It will bring together all of the agencies active in the area to ensure a co-ordinated response to the needs of the sector. It will specifically work with the following groups:

- Community based women's groups
- Men's groups
- Travellers and other ethnic minorities
- People with disabilities
- Community arts groups
- Older people

The unit will not fund groups, but will support capacity building and development of the groups. It will also commission or engage in research and provide for systematic evaluation and data-collection. It will also have a role in monitoring progression from community education programmes to mainstream provision. The National Adult Learning Council (NALC) will work with the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI) to develop certification and accreditation arrangements for the sector.

In terms of funding, the Government recognises the difficulties that have faced the sector to this point. It is now prepared to provide a more streamlined funding mechanism, long term funding and a separate budget line to be administered, eventually, by the Local Adult Learning Boards.

It is proposed to allocate 10% of the annual increase provided under the BTEI to the development of community education. This will ensure an investment of £20m over the span of the National Development Plan. It will be complimented by continued support under the initiatives operated by the Department of Social Community and Family Affairs and Area Development Management Local Development. The fund will initially be under the control of the Department of Education and Science (DES), who will hand over to the NALC on its establishment. It is envisaged, however, that the Local Adult Learning Boards will control the fund in the future in order to best address local needs.

Funds will be accessed by a competitive bidding process on the basis of a national scheme. Criteria for the scheme will be drawn up at national level in consultation with appropriate national interest groups. It is envisaged that funding would be based on a 3 year programme of activity and would address issues of premises and supporting services highlighted in the consultation process.

The White Paper also acknowledges the role of Community Education groups as providers and states that the NALC will be asked to formulate a strategy for the promotion of community sector involvement in programme delivery in consultation with statutory providers and community education groups. It is envisaged that the sector would become actively involved in all aspects of provision, including curriculum planning and design, and decisions regarding pedagogical approaches.

AONTAS has campaigned for the 3R's for Community Education - Recognition, Resources and Representation - since it first began working with community-based women's groups in the early nineties. We are pleased to see that the Government has recognised the vibrant and innovative work of the sector through its investment commitment as outlined in the White Paper.

In our response to the Green Paper, *Making an Impact*, AONTAS put forward the case for investment in terms of staff, finance, support service provision and representation on local structures. All of this has been addressed in the White Paper, although there are some concerns about the mechanisms for the inclusion of the community education sector on the Local Adult Learning Boards (see section on structures). We particularly applaud the appointment of Community Education Facilitators and the way in which it is proposed they will operate at local level. AONTAS was also concerned that staff structures at local level would be mirrored at national level in order to provide co-ordination and support. This will be achieved through the establishment of the Community Education Technical Support Unit.

The introduction of funding from the DES is also to be welcomed. It is important that the wish of the sector to preserve their current mechanisms of funding, particularly through the Department of Social Community and Family Affairs, has been taken on board and that provision is being made for investment in premises and support services.

Community Education groups have been providing education for a number of years. The opportunity to gain proper recognition as providers is an important step forward and should allow for their ultimate designation under the NQAI framework and for ease of access to national certification for their programmes.

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Workplace Education

The fact that the Irish economy is experiencing significant skills shortages and labour shortages is well documented. ESRI/FORFAS (1998) and the Chambers of Commerce of Ireland (1999), in two separate studies, have drawn attention to the difficulties which an increasing number of firms are having in filling vacancies, particularly for skilled staff in computer and engineering, crafts, clerical work and in the hotel and catering sector

The White Paper suggests that a proactive lifelong learning policy focused on the labour market requirements of a competitive Irish economy would:

- continue to focus on the labour market relevance of initial education and training;
- direct an increasing level of attention to the continuing education and training of those already at work;
  develop tailored programmes for groups wishing to re-enter the workforce, particularly for those with low educational levels; for women in the home, long-term unemployed or those aged over 60 currently out of the workforce or who may wish to re-enter it.

Learning Organisations

A highly skilled workforce is necessary to maintain competitiveness and for ensuring the capacity for adaptability and change. Allied to this, there is a need for both firms and workers to develop "soft" core skills, such as attitude to work, initiative, a quality focus, communications, problem solving, team-working, flexibility and learning to learn. There is a need for firms to view such investment in human capital as being as important and planned for, as is the case with investment in other aspects of business, such as plant, machinery, new products and processes. This is already the case with firms in other European countries.

The Government is concerned at the possibility that learners would terminate or postpone their participation in education because of the attractions of paid employment. It is also concerned that those already in employment are likely to have even less opportunity for ongoing training and development because industry, already short-staffed, cannot release workers for such programmes.

The concept of education/training/workplace consortia has been pioneered through a number of European initiatives in recent years. They provide an attractive option in exploring workplace education/training in that:

- they allow for locally relevant, customised responses with the voluntary participation of all the stakeholders
- they allow for flexible delivery systems and for new routeways between work and education
- they lead to new synergies between education, training and the workplace
- they can facilitate sectoral as well as area-based responses

- they normalise the co-existence of education and training with work
- they allow for local developments within the context of a national framework.

While larger companies will be in a position to fund and provide their own programmes for upskilling workers, it is recognised that the majority of small firms would find this difficult. They are therefore likely to rely heavily on the education and training sector and other mechanisms to provide lifelong learning opportunities.

The need is recognised for local education/training and industry partnerships, aimed at responding flexibly to local variations and priorities. A more fluid cross over from those in the workplace into training/education and from those in training/education into the workplace could be progressed through initiatives such as:

- expanded industry and work placement opportunities for higher education institutions;
- agreements between industry and education on aspects such as time-tabling and modularisation of course provision;
- recognition of learning in the workplace for accreditation and progression purposes;
- delivery of courses in the workplace.

Paid Educational Leave

Submissions to the *Programme for Prosperity and Fairness 2000* on the New Partnership Agreement stressed the importance of paid educational leave as a major incentive for workers to undertake education and training. Any developments in this area will need to incorporate a specific equality strategy, given the evidence in the International Adult Literacy Survey results for Ireland showing a marked disparity between the level of employer supports provided for males and females to enable them to access continuing education and training.

Flexible Education and Training

The White Paper recognises that, given the constraints imposed by firm size in Ireland, promoting a widespread culture of lifelong learning will require a renewed focus by education and training providers on creating flexible options for those in the workforce to combine employment, learning and family responsibilities. This is seen as being especially necessary given the constraints on employers releasing staff for training in a climate of labour and skill shortages. There is an urgent need identified to increase the range of flexible learning options through increased use of distance learning, part-time courses, and sandwich and summer courses. The Back to Education Initiative will, it is envisaged, provide for a substantial increase in this area combined with the National Adult ICT Skills Programme. It is recognised, however, that this needs to be accompanied by increased opportunities for mature student participation in third-level education, and the removal of barriers in this area.

Tax Relief

The utilisation of tax incentives to promote adult learning has been strongly advocated in the European *White Paper, Teaching and Learning: Towards the Learning Society (1995)*. While employers can currently avail of tax exemptions for many forms of education or training expenditure, and while tax relief is available for part-time third-level education and IT and language programmes in FAS, it is now seen as desirable that a uniform national approach be adopted based on

- treating *all* such investment in "human capital" by employers on the same basis for taxation purposes as other capital investment;
- providing tax relief for *all* participants for fees incurred in engaging in nationally certified learning programmes, irrespective of their location, duration and level.

It is recommended that a working group be established to explore the feasibility of such an approach, and examine the cost and administrative implications.

AONTAS is supportive of this proposal, but is concerned that the working group would convene as soon as possible and deliver a report within a short time frame, the conclusions of which would be acted upon as a priority.

Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) and Work-Based Learning (WBL)

The White Paper states that, in order to allow that APL and WBL take place on a larger scale than at present, certification and assessment processes need to adjust towards flexible forms of learning and assessment. In addition, it is recognised that systemised supports need to be made available to guide learners through these processes.

The White Paper suggests that the availability of qualified learning assessors for APL and WBL would greatly enhance provision in this area. It recommends that the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland and the National Adult Learning Council should explore the feasibility of a national training programme to develop a pool of highly skilled Learning Assessors. It is envisaged that the programme would be targeted at education and training providers, those in supervisory and management positions in industry (including people who may no longer be active in the workforce), in order to develop the necessary skills. This approach would help develop, over time, a pool of regionally based experts in a position to support individual, WBL and APL mechanisms in a flexible manner.

The Learning Assessor should have the role of both guiding and assessing individual learners through the assessment process. Following training and a quality assurance process, successful Learning Assessors would be recognised by the Further Education and Training Awards Council and the Higher Education and Training Awards Council. They could have their names published on a panel which could then be accessed through designated learning and assessment

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centres, on payment of a standard fee, by learners wishing to pursue this route to APL or WBL.

Community Employment (CE)
The National Adult Learning Council will work with FAS to explore ways in which CE participants can be encouraged to extend their education and training participation, both during their own time and in their sponsor's time.

Increased emphasis on the education and training component within Community Employment is part of the government's general strategy of increasing progression opportunities into work or further learning for participants on work experience programmes. In addition, a re-allocation of resources from Community Employment is also planned to partially fund a dedicated Social Economy Programme to encourage the provision of a range of services between commercial and statutory provision, particularly targeted at disadvantaged communities and long-term unemployed people. The programme will provide funding for three types of enterprise:

- Community Businesses ultimately financed from trading income alone which would be expected to move into self-sustaining viability in the medium term;
- Deficient Demand Social Economy Enterprises where the demand for goods and services within a community is not matched by resources to pay for them, due to disadvantage or low density of population;
- Enterprises based on public sector contracts, where public expenditure in disadvantaged communities is sub-contracted to local social economy enterprises.

New Entrants to the Workforce
A rapidly expanding workforce is recruiting workers at all skill levels. The Government is concerned that new entrants may be joining the workforce at the low skill end, poorly prepared for sectoral or economic downturn or for progressing their own careers. They are, therefore, vulnerable to unemployment and are limited in their career building prospects. There is a concern that people in such a situation should not have to make a choice between work and education/training, but that there should be active education and training support for them in the work context. This is be a priority of the Task Force on Lifelong Learning in consultation with employers and trade unions. The Trade Union Movement itself is seen as having a particular role to play in this area.

Emerging developments, following the Educational Welfare Act 2000, will also play an important role in this area. Under the Act, young people aged 16-18 who intend to leave school early will be required to register with the Educational Welfare Board. The Board will draw up a plan for the further education and training of the individual concerned, and will require that person to make all reasonable efforts to carry out the plan. It is on this basis that the Board will issue a certificate entitling the young person to work, and it will not be possible for the a young person aged between 16 and 18 to be employed without a certificate.

Workplace Literacy

The continued expansion of the Adult Literacy Service will include a focus on expansion of workplace literacy initiatives in collaboration with industry. NALA has trained a number of tutors to provide literacy in the workplace and has promoted the availability of the service among employer organisations. A pilot project has started in a large firm in the Dublin area, and similar initiatives are being planned for workers in the health and local authority sectors. These will be further expanded in the light of experience and evaluation of their effectiveness.

Languages

2001 will be designated the *European Year of Languages*. During that year information and promotional measures will be undertaken (at European, national, regional and local levels) with the aim of encouraging language learning throughout the EU. Language learning will be a particular priority within programmes under the Back to Education Initiative.

Technical Support

The promotion of opportunities for education and training of those in the work place will be a key priority of the National Adult Learning Council. A unit will be established within the Council to provide technical support and advice on initiatives and policies in this area, on an ongoing basis.

AONTAS is particularly concerned about the education, training and development needs of low-skilled workers. Under the proposals outlined in the White Paper, this group will still be marginalised and, at the same time, at high risk of future unemployment and poverty should they be made redundant, a fact made clear through the experience of workers in organisations such as Fruit of the Loom. Many low-skilled workers are in receipt of the minimum wage, which puts them outside the reach of assistance under the Back to Education Initiative. They cannot afford to access education on this wage, cannot afford to pay for educational guidance and are the least likely to benefit from company training policies. AONTAS is concerned that measures must be put in place to ensure that this group can avail of the opportunities necessary to equip them for a growing and developing, high-skilled, knowledge-based economy.

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Higher Education

The White Paper sets the tone for the role of higher education institutions in relation to mature applicants by drawing on the reports of the Committee on Post-Secondary Education and Training Places, the Commission on the Points System, the OECD Education Policy Analysis and the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness. It highlights the priority changes needed at Third Level as involving:

1. Establishment of targets at institutional level across faculties and disciplines for full-time and part-time mature students enrolments in line with national targets
2. Recognition of the need for much greater flexibility by those institutions in:

- Timing (part-time/full-time mix)
- Modularisation of programmes
- Semesterised delivery
- Off-campus provision
- Expanding the range of delivery modes and adopting more adult-friendly teaching methodologies and a culture of transparency and dialogue
- Recognition of a range of access routes and qualifications
- Provision and/or recognition of access programmes
- Development of outreach strategies and distance delivery
- Implementation of an equality strategy to promote and monitor the participation of specific groups
- Data-gathering mechanisms which support evaluation and analysis of recruitment, participation and progression trends for specific groups
- Networking between colleges to share good practice and develop mainstream co-ordinated approaches
- Procedures for the accreditation of prior learning
- Recognition of the non-linear nature of adult education
- Transparent mechanisms for inter-institutional credit transfer and accumulation, within and across levels, sectors and the binary divide
- Wider range of assessment procedures, incorporating a clear outcomes focus
- Ensuring that criteria concerning equality issues are adhered to in extending mature student participation
- Expansion of single-module credit where appropriate
- Educational information and guidance services, appropriate to the needs of adults and school leavers
- Counselling and pastoral care services
- Additional mentoring, tuition and group support as needed
- Childcare facilities for parent participants
- Full access to college library, IT, sport and social facilities

This approach should be co-ordinated and consistent across all colleges as part of a national approach to educational provision.

A Targeted Higher Education Mature Student Access Fund will be established to promote institutional and co-ordinated change to increase mature student participation at undergraduate level. The fund will be competitive, based on the criteria outlined above. There will also be an emphasis on partnership approaches with other colleges, accrediting bodies and the sharing of results and good practice. The fund will be increased on a phased basis linked to validated demand based on mature student demand, which will be assessed by market research. Progress in individual colleges will be monitored by the HEA, which is being asked to compile a composite national report on a twice-yearly basis.

The fund will usually cover undergraduate, short or modular courses with national certification, nationally certified distance education programmes and access courses that carry entitlement to entry.

AONTAS welcomes these changes in direction. The rigidity and inflexibility of Higher Education Institutions has been cited regularly as a barrier for mature students, whose needs are quite fundamentally different to those of Leaving Certificate students. Institutions have regularly stated that change can only happen through additional resourcing specifically for this purpose. The Government has now put this funding in place and it is up to the institutions to develop the requisite support structures and flexible learning paths to enable participation.

AONTAS particularly welcomes the move towards access courses providing entitlement to entry. Mature students who have participated on these programmes have been full of hope for their future educational prospects, only to have them dashed by a system that refuses even to give a reason for non-acceptance onto a full time programme of study. The use of Access courses as an entitlement to entry will also assist in the tracking of participants and an assessment of additional interventions which may be necessary in order to enhance their progression opportunities.

Distance Education

NALC will be asked to work with the HEA to develop distance education provision. They are to prioritise mechanisms for financial support for initial course development work and maximising the use of ICT and broadcasting in delivery.

AONTAS believes that the development of distance education programmes will lead to increased participation. The proposal under the Third Level Mature Student Access Programme to include nationally certified distance education programmes in the fees structures outlined elsewhere in the White Paper should see an increase in the numbers participating. The establishment of Designated

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Learning Centres could also assist in providing mentoring, IT and other supports and should be viewed as a necessity in the support of distance education developments.

Student Support

Although the majority of submissions on the Green Paper advocated the abolition of part-time third level fees, the Government is not prepared to introduce such a measure at this time. Rather, it is intended to allow those categories of participants or dependants in receipt of the payments set out under category 2 of the BTEI.

AONTAS is highly disappointed at this move. We believe that the fees issue is still the biggest barrier to participation and that only a complete abolition, as with full-time provision, can protect the interests of the learner. The situation for learners is complex, as confusion abounds with regard to entitlement to free fees. Many enrol in part-time programmes only to discover that fees apply, and cannot afford to pay them. It is proposed in the White Paper that the fees issue be monitored closely to assess its impact. AONTAS believes that this should particularly apply at third level, which has been most prohibitive in the past with regard to many issues, not least of these financial.

We are, however, heartened that the Government has taken on board comments made in relation to institutional barriers to education and is seeking to redress the situation by way of the competitive fund. We are hopeful that institutions will use this fund to develop facilities and to create a more cohesive learning environment, which will cater for the needs of adult learners. The monitoring function of the HEA should also assist in ensuring that the situation improves in the long term.

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Support Services

Training of Adult Educators

The White Paper envisages a system in the future whereby practitioners of adult education will be trained to third level, professional standards. It is proposed to establish an Inter Agency Working Group (IAWG) to examine issues of professionalisation, including the feasibility of developing a generic training programme. It is envisaged that this training programme would operate on a modular, in-service basis in the first instance and, later, as a pre-service training programme. The work of the Inter Agency Working Group will proceed on a phased basis, in tandem with a process of consultation, research and review of best international practice.

People working within the service who do not currently have a qualification are to be facilitated to attain certification through block release, in-work education and in-service opportunities.

The IAWG is to look specifically at needs of practitioners who lack a qualification. It is hoped that they will pave the way for the assessment of prior learning, workplace learning, criterion-referenced assessment and community learning.

A Forum for Adult Education Practitioners will also be established to provide an opportunity for practitioners to network, share best practice, inform policy development and develop a peer support mechanism.

Staff conditions will also be addressed, in consultation with staff interests and in the context of public pay parameters.

AONTAS stressed these elements of the professionalisation programme in *Making an Impact*. We are pleased to note that our concerns with regard to the professionalisation of the service and the development of appropriate terms and conditions of service for practitioners have been taken on board.

The development of flexible qualifications for those practitioners who currently lack a qualification was another area of concern, particularly for volunteers working in the community education sector. The development of part-time, block release, modularised and in-service programmes should ensure that those who wish to gain a qualification are enabled to do so. Supports should also be provided for these learners in line with supports available to all other adult learners.

Furthermore, the development of systems of APL for those experienced, non-qualified workers operating within the sector should be addressed as a priority issue by the NALC in association with the NQAI.

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Assessment and Accreditation

The White Paper makes recommendations to the NQAI in relation to accreditation. In particular, it mentions the need to accredit workplace and community learning and the development of panels of Learning Assessors and designated learning centres. It also recommends that the NQAI be represented on the NALC.

AONTAS believes that developing good working relationships with the National Qualifications Authority will ultimately assist in progressing the development of systems for the accreditation of prior and experiential learning, credit accumulation and transfer and workplace learning.

However, the basis for any good working relationship is equality. This will be difficult to achieve in a situation where the National Qualifications Authority is represented in its own right on the National Adult Learning Council, but with no reciprocal arrangement provided for. This effectively means that the National Qualifications structures will set the pace for the adult education sector in relation to accreditation, but the sector will have no effective voice or vote in terms of the advancement of the qualifications framework.

AONTAS stressed the need for partnership and equality in Making an Impact. We are disappointed that this has not been put in place. We believe that there is a necessity to have direct representation of the National Adult Learning Council on the NQAI in order that the wealth of expertise in the sector, particularly in relation to community education, be harnessed. As there is no direct representative of the community education sector on the NQAI, this issue becomes more pertinent.

It is also the case that accreditation issues have been critical for the adult education sector, who were not actively encouraged to participate in the debate on the establishment of the qualifications framework. Many of those involved in adult education still believed that their issues could be addressed in the White Paper currently before us. This was not the case and we now have recommendations included in the White Paper which are not binding on the NQAI.

AONTAS believes that this situation should be addressed as a priority, with reciprocal representation for the NALC the primary objective.

Adult Guidance and Counselling

The White Paper provides an overview of current initiatives in the area of adult guidance and counselling. £35m has been allocated under the National Development Plan for staff development and support initiatives in a National Guidance and Counselling Service. It is intended that the service would fill gaps in current provision by:

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- provision of comprehensive information on adult learning opportunities in a format which is accessible to all. The wide range of providers in the field of adult education and training, and the frequency of changing course options, has contributed to fragmentation and considerable confusion in this area
- exploring the scope for developing national specifications and standards for a national website of learning opportunities, which can be locally updated and accessed on a local, institutional, sectoral or programme basis
- co-ordination, coherence and streamlining of access arrangements for mature students into third-level already highlighted by the Points Commission
- provision of a telephone helpline service, as well ICT information points in libraries and community education services;
- provision of training in front line guidance and counselling skills for staff across the adult education and training sector;
- building on initiatives under YOUTHSTART and the FAS NUI Maynooth programme, the development of a framework for qualifications in vocational training and professional development, enabling systemised training to be provided for the front line and specialist staff in the field;
- expansion of core adult guidance and counselling staff on a phased basis until a comprehensive service is available and provision of necessary ICT and other supports for the service;
- identifying and sharing best practice, providing technical support and development, and monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the service. It is envisaged that the National Centre for Guidance in Education, working closely with the National Adult Learning Council, will play a critical role in this area. The adult educational guidance service will be co-ordinated and managed locally, and networked with other providers, by the Local Adult Learning Boards.

Initially, the service will prioritise the needs of certain client groups and will have a number of levels:

(a) provision of a coherent information base which can be self-accessed by learners, allied with a helpline;
(b) initial consultations with a trained adviser to help clarify needs, indicate appropriate pathways and/or referral;
(c) more specialised support such as counselling (career, educational or personal) and assessment;
(d) referral to psychological services where needed.

The first two levels, will be a foundation level of service, which will be available to all. The next two levels will be provided free to participants on adult literacy, VTOS and Youthreach programmes, and for participants entitled to free fees or a reduction to 30% under the Back to Education Initiative.

For the remainder, it is envisaged that fees will be charged should they wish to avail of specialised support. All Adult Education providers are encouraged to

develop a policy on Adult Education guidance, taking into account the framework provided in this paper.

It is also recognised that some participants may need referral to the psychological services. In the interim, referrals will be made to private practitioners but it is intended that the psychological service of the DES will ultimately be expanded to cope with the increasing demands of the education service.

AONTAS advocated the establishment of a National Guidance and Counselling programme as part of its response to the Green Paper. Indeed, it is an area on which AONTAS has been active for many years, having seen the clear need for such a service through analysis of information calls made to our offices and research conducted into the Adult Education service in Ireland.

AONTAS is pleased to see that the foundation level of service is to be made available to all, free of charge. It is essential, however, to include those in the workforce on low incomes and with low educational attainment in the catchment group, given that these people are high risk in relation to future unemployment. Giving these people access to such a service would increase their long-term employment prospects and help to ensure that the closing of large commercial or industrial operations would have a minimal impact in the future.

It is also essential to ensure that the helpline and other supports are well advertised and are available outside office hours. Measures should be taken to ensure that people with literacy difficulties, in particular, know how to access the service.

Role of the Inspectorate

Under the Education Act, the Minister for Education and Science has to ensure that every person is in a position to avail of a quality education service that meets their needs. To ensure the quality of such a service, the Minister has delegated responsibility to the Inspectorate. They will have a role in the quality assurance of the Adult Education Service in line with the provisions of the Education Act.

This will mean that a support structure is available to practitioners, schools and centres of education in relation to the quality of provision. The role of the Inspectorate is designed to assist rather than insist and will allow the entire education system to function in a systemic manner, building on provision at each level. AONTAS believes that by working closely with the NALC and the LALBs, the Inspectorate can enhance aspects of the service and learn innovative methods, which may be transferable to other sectors of education.

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Irish Language and Culture

There was a visible gap in the Green Paper with regard to provision through the medium of Irish. The following is now proposed:

- increased and flexible provision of Irish courses and classes at locally accessible venues to cater for the needs of adults, taking account of the need to combine family, work, leisure and education roles;
- development of a structured approach leading to a graded system of assessment and certification, taking account of the work by Institiuid Teangeolaiochta na hEireann in this area, and emerging developments under the national qualifications framework;
- providing for distance education and opportunities for self-directed learning in Irish and through Irish, supported by the appropriate materials;
- providing opportunities for staff in the adult education sector to enhance their language skills;
- enhancing the range of programmes available to adults through the medium of Irish.

In order to promote and co-ordinate developments in this area, an Irish Language Officer will be appointed to the National Adult Learning Council, and a sub-committee of relevant interests will be established by the Council to progress initiatives. The sub-committee will provide for participation by Irish language bodies and representatives from VECs and Area Partnerships in Gaeltacht areas.

In Gaeltacht areas, needs have been highlighted in relation to adult literacy in the Irish language, provision of community and basic education, and ensuring an adequate range of options in the Irish language to enable participants to progress to PLC courses. Addressing the scarcity of materials and tutors, and the need to provide for different dialects in the Gaeltacht areas are part of the challenge.

In order to address these needs, the Department of Education and Science has agreed to fund a 3-year initiative in Gaeltacht areas which will be implemented jointly by VECs and the Local Area Partnerships. The objective is to develop an integrated adult basic education programme in each area through the medium of Irish, incorporating communications, literacy, language, numeracy, ICT skills and key "learning to learn" skills. Development Workers are being employed to work as an integrated team under the project, one for each dialect region. Their role is to design tutor training courses in adult basic education, to develop appropriate teaching materials and to plan and resource promotional strategies in each area, so that a basic education service through the Irish language can then be delivered locally.

AONTAS is aware of the difficulties experienced by Gaeltacht communities in accessing adult education through the medium of Irish and endorses the provisions made in the White Paper. It is also necessary to look at Irish language tuition for mature students in the context of adults who wish to pursue a teaching degree and do not fulfil the Irish language requirement. AONTAS believes that

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the Oifigeach na Gaeilge appointed to the NALC should examine this issue and work with the various Irish language bodies to ensure that provision is available at the required level.

Childcare

Little is said in relation to childcare in the White Paper. This is highly regrettable given that it has been identified as a huge barrier to participation, particularly for women. Although additional funding has been provided through the National Development Plan, the end use of this money is still unclear. A concerted effort must be made to address the current childcare crisis. AONTAS will continue to lobby on this issue until meaningful change is achieved.

Older People

The White Paper draws attention to the fact that older people have a valuable contribution to make to the adult education service as:

- providers
- mentors
- literacy volunteers
- promoters of solidarity between the ages
- childminders
- learners

It points to the need to encourage older workers back to the workforce. There is no age restriction on application to many courses and older people will be able to participate under the Back to Education Initiative.

People with Disabilities

The transfer of responsibility for training of people with disabilities to FAS is not intended to obviate the need for all education and training providers to make specific provision to ensure that people with disabilities can access mainstream services. A range of actions is being proposed in order to progress this area:

- people with disabilities should be targeted by every Adult Education programme so that they may avail of integrated mainstream options on an equal basis;
- disability awareness training should be developed and provided for Adult Education and training staff generally in order to promote awareness of the barriers facing students with disabilities; to promote the cultural relevance of programmes; to encourage dialogue with disability groups and individual participants as to how programmes can be adapted to their needs; to share practice on how barriers can be overcome;
- the existing third-level fund under which additional supports (adaptive technology, readers, interpreters, care assistance and transport etc) are made available should be expanded to cover the other areas of Adult Education.

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The operation of the existing schemes should be enhanced to ensure:

- earlier processing of applications;
- mechanisms are provided through the fund for professional advice and assessment of individuals' needs for adaptive technology, based on the experience of the recent HORIZON projects in this area;
- that adaptive technology can be assigned to individuals, rather than institutions, so that it can be transferred from one learning sector/setting/level to another;
- arrangements to enable students to keep equipment for ongoing personal use where a period of at least 3 years usage has expired.

Distance learning methodologies are cited as being of particular relevance to students with disabilities, and it is stated that programme content and support services should be designed with this in mind. In addition, it is recommended that students in receipt of a long-term disability welfare payment should have free access to relevant, nationally certified distance learning programmes in Ireland.

A sizeable grant will be provided to the Irish Deaf Society to develop a service, over the next five years, which will address the literacy needs of deaf people throughout Ireland. Based on the experience of a successful pilot project, **Linkup**, funded under the Women's Education Initiative, 25 tutors will be trained to deliver adult literacy classes through Irish Sign Language and to give literacy courses to deaf people in five locations around Ireland.

Access Officers in third-level colleges will continue to network to share practice and experience and to make policy recommendations to the Higher Education Authority on the scope for improved services.

All new buildings should be accessible to students with disabilities, and existing premises assessed for compliance with this need. In the provision of capital for further education, priority should be given to the adaptation of premises where needs arise.

These recommendations will be progressed on a phased basis in consultation with the relevant interests. The National Adult Learning Council will be asked to establish an Advisory Committee to report within a specific timeframe on developments in this area, and to monitor progress. An Access Officer will be appointed to the Council to co-ordinate and support the task.

As part of the development of performance indicators for the system, the White Paper also advocates that tracking mechanisms be developed to monitor the participation of students with disabilities at every level of the system.

Travellers

The government believes that catering for cultural diversity needs to be a concern in all spheres of provision. In particular, the White Paper highlights the

need for Traveller women and men to be targeted within adult literacy and VTOS programmes and for dialogue on how the schemes can be adapted to strengthen their relevance for these groups. The employment of Travellers within these services also need to be encouraged, given their importance as role models in the community.

In line with the recommendations made by the Inter-Departmental Group on Literacy for the Unemployed, a review of financial barriers to participation in education and training is needed. These include the removal of anomalies in regard to secondary benefits and the treatment of income disregards where both spouses have a training allowance or welfare payment.

Refugees and Asylum Seekers

Refugees are entitled to the same access to education and training as Irish nationals. In relation to adults, a Refugee Language Support Unit has been established in Trinity College to co-ordinate language assessment and tuition on a national basis. However, at present asylum seekers are not in a position to access any services of this nature. This poses particular difficulties for parents and siblings of children who are trying to integrate into Irish schools, and causes problems for schools in promoting home/school links.

In principle, the Government is anxious to expand the role of the Refugee Language Support Unit to include provision for asylum seekers, and to explore the scope for providing a national programme in this area through the VECs and other further education providers. As a first step, a study will be undertaken to assess the likely numbers who may need additional language assistance, and discussions will be held with the relevant Departments and agencies to assess the implications of this in terms of funding and co-ordination staff, and implementation arrangements.

The White Paper proposes the following policy in relation to the participation by asylum seekers in education and training:

Children aged between 15-18

- referral to school or Youthreach, as appropriate;

Asylum seekers with entitlement to work (all pre-26 July 1999 asylum seekers who are at least one year in Ireland):

- free access to adult literacy, English language and mother culture supports;
- free access to active labour market programmes such as VTOS or PLC if over 21 and six months registered unemployed, on the same basis as other participants. As non-EU nationals they would not get maintenance grants for full-time PLC courses, but no fees would be charged, given the fact that there has never been a State fee for PLCs;
- access to free part-time Back to Education Initiative programmes up to and including PLC level for social welfare recipients, under arrangements set out for Category 2 in Chapter 4;

In line with other non-EU nationals, access to third-level education will apply only on payment of the economic fee, and there will be no entitlement to maintenance grants.

Those who do not have an entitlement to work;

- free access to adult literacy, English language and mother culture supports.

Rural Development

The Adult Education and training sector has an important role to play in promoting and sustaining development in rural communities. This will be progressed through:

- an active role in the implementation of the National Spatial Strategy as it emerges;
- working closely with Teagasc and other agencies in supporting training for off-farm income generation under the Rural Viability Programme, particularly in the areas of enterprise, literacy, ICT training, tourism, teleworking;
- supporting and promoting the cultural identity of rural areas;
- optimising the use of the existing network of schools for Adult Education activity;
- supporting the continued viability of rural schools;
- exploring innovatory approaches to addressing transport barriers, including distance learning, mobile outreach facilities and co-operation with Area-Based Partnerships and local authorities in transport sharing schemes;
- participation in the National Rural Development Forum;
- rural proofing of policies and practice on an ongoing basis;
- promoting integrated area-based approaches through the work of the Local Adult Learning Boards and the County Development Boards.

Homeless People

The Government Strategy on Homelessness provides for the establishment of a homeless services centre, within the Dublin area, to manage and co-ordinate the delivery of integrated services for homeless people in the Dublin area by statutory and voluntary agencies to address the accommodation, health, education, training, employment, personal and social needs. The service will have dedicated staff located in the centre from Dublin Corporation and the Eastern Health Authority together with a co-ordinator from FAS and the VEC with appropriate linkages with the Probation Service.

The work of the education co-ordinator will focus on the development of outreach links with relevant statutory and community and voluntary groups, reporting on learning needs for homeless people and co-ordinating the provision of appropriate literacy, community or basic education programmes in line with the needs identified. Provision will embrace a spectrum ranging from initial tuition and guidance located in hostels to specific programmes for homeless people in education and training centres, and progression from there to mainstream learning options. Provision of back-up welfare, health and guidance

and counselling services have been identified as a critical pre-requisite if the approach is to be effective.

Prisoners and Ex-Offenders

The Prison Education Service incorporates important partnership between the Department of Justice Equality and Law Reform, the VECs, the Open University, the Arts Council, several third-level colleges and a range of other bodies.

Under the National Development Plan 2000-2006, £70.7m is being invested in provision of work experience, vocational training and personal supports to custodial prisoners and offenders and their families in order to help them to successfully re-integrate into the social and economic life of their communities.

A key priority for the education sector in this context will be to enhance the relevance and diversity of provision within the prison education service and to strengthen the linkages between in-prison provision and that available for prisoners on release, in collaboration with other relevant agencies. The Bridge Project which is provided through a collaboration of FAS, VEC and the Probation Service, and the Dillon's Cross Project in Cork City working with prisoner's families will provide important models for future action in this area.

AONTAS has campaigned on the issue of supports for marginalised and excluded members of our society and fully supports the targeting of resources at these groups. It is necessary, however, to implement the recommendations and initiatives outlined in the White Paper as soon as possible in order to address in a meaningful manner the inequalities in our society.

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Co-operation with Northern Ireland

White Paper: *A New Learning Culture for All*

In Northern Ireland, following consultations on a Green Paper, the Government set out its policies for development of the Adult Education and training sector in a paper entitled *Lifelong Learning: A New Learning Culture for All (1999)*.

It is clear that there are extensive opportunities to co-operate and share experience in areas of mutual concern. Both the National Development Plan for Ireland and the Development Plan for Northern Ireland include a common chapter on cross border co-operation.

Within the education and training sector there will be a particular focus on joint co-operation in:

- inter-active approaches at university and further education level in such areas as R&D and support for small and medium sized enterprises;
- the development of lifelong learning, adult literacy and adult guidance and counselling programmes, and promotion education/community/business links;
- information and communications technology in schools;
- addressing educational under-achievement.

Under the Special EU Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation, a Centre for Cross-Border Studies, based in Armagh, has been established to research and develop co-operation across the border areas in education, business, public administration and communications. The Centre is undertaking research in collaboration with the relevant Departments, North and South, in relation to the scale and impact of cross-border exchange programmes.

North/South Ministerial Council

Within the context of the North/South Ministerial Council for Education established under the Good Friday Agreement, particular priority is being given to joint co-operation in:

- addressing special education needs and educational under-achievement;
- promoting teacher mobility;
- mutual recognition of qualifications;
- school, youth and teacher exchanges.

Other Areas for Co-operation

Other areas targeted for joint co-operation include:

- sharing practice under the National Anti-Poverty Strategy and the Targeting Social Need initiative in Northern Ireland;
- promoting reconciliation, building local capacity and promoting the inclusion of marginalised groups;
- addressing labour shortages and promoting lifelong learning;

This work will be progressed and strengthened in the years ahead through the development of strategic links at national and local levels between North/South education and training providers and policy makers. The work will be supported through the appointment of a staff member in the National Adult Learning Council for this purpose, and who will also focus on the potential of best international practice which can inform future policies and strategies in the field of Adult Education and training.

AONTAS welcomes the identification of potential linkages with Northern Ireland in relation to adult education policy. One of the key findings of our consultation process related to the difficulties of people in the Border counties in having qualifications acquired in Northern Ireland recognised in the Republic. It is important to progress this and other issues in partnership with the new structures operating in Northern Ireland. AONTAS will be pleased to share experience at this level. AONTAS is currently progressing partnerships with organisations in Northern Ireland such as the Worker's Education Association (WEA) and the Educational Guidance Service for Adults (EGSA) in an effort to address best practice and the forging of strategic links on a cross-border basis.

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Structures

National Adult Learning Council (NALC)

The NALC will be established as a priority. It will be an executive agency of the Department of Education and Science under the Education Act (1998). Its terms of reference will be as follows:

- to promote the development of the Adult Education sector in line with national social and economic needs;
- to promote co-ordination of the work of participating bodies within an agreed national strategy and policy framework, and to liaise with the wide variety of stakeholders in the field;
- to advise on Adult Education priorities;
- to monitor the implementation of an agreed strategy;
- to advise Government on policy and related matters in the field of Adult Education;
- to liaise with the other education sectors in facilitating the achievement of lifelong learning objectives;
- to fund, co-ordinate and monitor the delivery of programme and staff development initiatives for designated Adult Education programmes within the Further Education sector of the Department of Education and Science;
- to advise on quality standards in Adult Education provision in consultation with the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland, and to facilitate the dissemination of good practice;
- to engage in research and evaluation in the field of Adult Education;
- to promote cross border and international co-operation in Adult Education.

The terms of reference outlined above concentrate the work of the NALC on the critical areas of co-ordination, liaison, policy advice, monitoring, quality, staff development and research. As constituted at present, they do not envisage a function for the Council as a funding and administration body in relation to programmes (other than staff development programmes) in the Further Education sector. However, this issue will be re-visited in the light of emerging developments in relation to a review of organisational structures and roles within the Department of Education and Science itself.

AONTAS have made it clear that the NALC must have a resourcing function in order to be effective. We believe that all adult education funding should be channelled through the NALC to the LALBs in order that it is disbursed in accordance with the area education plan.

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Structure
The NALC will have a Governing Board, the membership of which will be:

- one representative nominated by AONTAS;
- one representative nominated by the National Adult Literacy Agency;
- two representatives nominated by the community and voluntary pillar;
- one representative from each of the training agencies FAS, Teagasc and CERT;
- one representative from the each of the following management bodies -Irish Vocational Education Association; Joint Managerial Body and Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools;
- one representative each from the Teachers Union of Ireland and the Association of Secondary Teachers of Ireland;
- one representative nominated by the Union of Students of Ireland;
- two representatives from employers;
- one representative nominated by ICTU;
- one representative nominated by the Higher Education Authority;
- one representative nominated by the Council of Directors of Institutes of Technology;
- one representative nominated by the Council of Heads of Irish Universities;
- one representative of the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland;
- two nominees of the Minister for Education and Science;
- two nominees of the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment.
- The Chairperson of the Council will be appointed by the Minister for Education and Science in consultation with the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment.

AONTAS had sought representation on the NALC and on other emerging structures in its own right. We are therefore pleased with the structure of the NALC as outlined in the White Paper.

The Council staff structure will have four technical support units within it as follows:

- Adult Education and the Formal Education Sector
- Workplace Learning
- Community Education
- Research

The terms of reference for each of these Units will be as set out below.

Adult Education and the Formal Education Sector
The role of the Adult Education and the Formal Education Sector Unit will be:

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- to support Adult Education providers and the work of the Local Adult Learning Boards in terms of area planning, curriculum development, programme delivery and evaluation, and integration of provision;
- to co-ordinate and provide an appropriate staff development programme for the Further Education sector;
- to promote and co-ordinate support services for adult learners, e.g. a guidance service;
- to promote and facilitate broadly based interaction amongst the key stakeholders in Adult Education;
- to advise on policy and quality assurance;
- to support Higher Education institutions in expanding their mature student provision;
- to promote the development of appropriate Adult Education services through Irish to meet the needs of Gaeltacht and non-Gaeltacht regions;
- to promote equality of participation, benefit and outcome from Adult Education for participants from under-represented groups, particularly people with disabilities, and travellers, and to monitor progress in this area.

It is intended that this Unit will have a key role in co-ordinating and supporting the work of the national co-ordinators already in place across the Further Education system. These include Youthreach, VTOS, Senior Traveller Training Centres and Adult Literacy. The personnel concerned will continue to be sited in their present locations. In effect, the National Adult Learning Council will integrate the work of the Further Education Support Service referred to in the Green Paper into its framework of activities, but will ensure continued flexibility in the dispersal of such staff, as appropriate, in locations throughout the country.

An Access Officer will be engaged to promote, develop and support the implementation of an equality strategy for participation of Travellers and those with disabilities in Adult Education. The Unit will also establish the Advisory Committee on developments in the integration of people with physical and learning disabilities into Adult Education, and to monitor progress in this area.

An Irish Language Officer will work within the Unit to promote the development of Adult Education in Irish and through Irish, to liaise with national level Irish language bodies, and to co-ordinate the development of initiatives in this area. The Council will establish a sub-committee to promote and monitor developments.

Workplace Learning

The role of the Workplace Learning Unit will be:

- to support the establishment of education/training/workplace consortia through the work of the Local Adult Learning Boards;
- to promote innovative approaches to workplace learning, particularly in the application of ICT and distance education;
- to explore with the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland the feasibility of establishing a panel of Learning Assessors and Designated Assessment

Centres for purposes of APL and WBL, and to support the quality of provision in this area;

- to promote opportunities for poorly qualified labour market entrants to continue to upgrade their skills;
- to promote the capacity of the Adult Education system to address skills needs in the workplace, particularly in relation to new technology, foreign languages and areas where shortages have been highlighted by the Expert Group on Future Skill Needs.

Community Education

The role of the Community Education Unit will be:

- to promote, co-ordinate and network the work of the Community Education Facilitators;
- to promote the role of Community Education groups as providers of Adult Education;
- to interact with the NGO structure throughout the country in developing a Community Education model in a number of sectors, namely:

  Community-Based Women's Groups
  Men's Groups
  Travellers and other Ethnic Minorities
  People with Disabilities
  Community Arts Groups
  Older People

- to promote and monitor innovative pedagogical approaches in community education;
- to promote in association with the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland the development of appropriate mechanisms for the assessment and accreditation of community learning;
- to promote the development of partnerships between statutory agencies and community education groups;
  to promote equality of participation, benefit and outcome from Adult Education for participants from under-represented groups, particularly people with disabilities, and Travellers, and to monitor progress in this area;
- to identify and share good practice particularly in the areas of outreach, access and participation of marginalised groups in Adult Education.

Research

The role of the Research Unit will be:

- to undertake or commission research, studies, evaluations and/or data gathering on participation and provision in Adult Education which will:-
- to inform the development of policy initiatives targeted on areas of need;
- to track the participation of minorities and other disadvantaged groups within the commitment to equality and multiculturalism;

- to identify and document models of best practice in all aspects of adult and lifelong learning;
- to maintain an awareness of Ireland's position with regard to adult learning within an international context.
- to advise on the development of performance indicators which should be used to monitor the quality and effectiveness of provision;
- to undertake and evaluate on a rolling basis all aspects of Adult Education provision and to liaise with the Inspectorate in this area;
- to promote and develop strategic linkages with Adult Education providers overseas, particularly in relation to North/South, East/West and EU relations.

There are limitations as to the representation that can be provided for within the structures of the National Adult Learning Council. Therefore, part of the work of the Council will be to establish and convene appropriate fora through which wider representation can influence policy and practice. This approach should provide for the Forum for Practitioners in Adult Education as well as providing a vehicle for a stronger role for groups representing Disability, Traveller and community education interests. It also provides a mechanism to forge strategic links with other key organisations.

Given its recommendations in terms of staffing and support structures for the new adult education service, AONTAS is welcoming this initiative.

AONTAS believes that the employment of staff in technical support units is key to the successful implementation of the policy initiatives outlined in the White Paper. They will bring coherence to the adult education system and ensure that important data collection, research and analysis will take place. Furthermore, they will enable networking of stakeholders and other interests, support for local staff and providers and a liaison with key decision and policy-makers.

It is imperative that the technical support units are adequately resourced and that proper reporting, consulting and disseminating procedures are put in place so that optimum benefit can be gained from this system.

AONTAS urges the government to establish these structures as quickly as possible.

Staff

The National Adult Learning Council will have a core management staff of six - a Chief Executive, a Finance/Personnel/ IT Officer, and four Unit Heads, responsible for each of the Units outlined above. It will also have an Access Officer, an Irish Language Officer and a Research/International Officer, be supported with the necessary technical and administrative staff, and be in a position to draw on the resources elsewhere within the system, such as national co-ordinators, Adult Education organisers, community education facilitators etc.

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Local Adult Learning Boards (LALBs)

The task of putting in place structures for the planning, management and development of Adult and Community Education provision at local level involves recognition that:

- Provision is currently fragmented, lacks a strategic area-based approach and is under-resourced and
- That the ad hoc Adult Education Boards have not been consistently successful in addressing needs.

Terms of Reference

Thirty-three Local Adult Education Boards will be established throughout the country to:

- establish the level of Adult Education needs in their region;
- develop an integrated action plan at local level to meet these needs, ensuring full complementarity with training and education services provided by other bodies;
- promote and develop a comprehensive information service regarding the full range of services available locally;
- promote the co-ordination and complementarity of developments in regard to the Employment Services and the evolution of the Adult Educational Guidance Service;
- be responsible for the co-ordination of the work of participating bodies at local level;
- facilitate the targeting of Adult Education resources on area priorities in the context of an agreed lifelong learning strategy;
- promote equality of participation, benefit and outcome from Adult Education for participants from under-represented groups, particularly people with disabilities, and travellers, and monitor progress in this area;
- decide on the deployment of Adult Education resources within the education sector on the basis of agreed national criteria;
- promote and support the development of Community Education provision, and the development of partnerships between the community and voluntary and statutory sectors;
- provide organisational, administrative, professional and financial support to Adult Education services in the area;
- report annually to the National Adult Learning Council on the delivery of services in the region.

Members of the boards would be chosen for their expertise and involvement in the field of Adult Education and training, their knowledge of area needs and their capacity to influence and report on decision-making and delivery in their respective agencies.

Structure

Membership of the Local Adult Learning Boards should include:

- four representatives nominated by the community and voluntary pillar, including Travellers and disability interests;

- one representative from each of the training agencies, FAS, Teagasc and CERT;
- one representative nominated by each of the school sectors in the area – vocational, secondary, and community/comprehensive;
- one representative each from the Teachers Union of Ireland and the Association of Secondary Teachers of Ireland;
- one representative of learners;
- two representatives from employers;
- one representative nominated by ICTU;
- one representative of the Area Partnership;
- two representatives of the VEC;
- one representative of the County/City Development Board;
- one representative of the Library Service;
- one representative from the adult literacy service;
- one representative of the health boards;
- one representative of the Institutes of Technology, where there is such provision in the Board's catchment area;
- 1 representative of the university sector where there is such provision in the Board's catchment area.

AONTAS believes that the terms of reference for the new LALBs are accurate and reflect the needs as evidence by groups active at local level.

In terms of the composition of the Local Boards, AONTAS is concerned with the proposed mechanism for appointment of the community and voluntary representatives by the Community Pillar. The Community Pillar is a national body comprised of national organisations operating at national level. It does not operate at local level and does not, therefore, have the capacity to make these important appointments. AONTAS would urge the government to review this proposed procedure in consultation with appropriate interest groups. AONTAS notes that the Local Adult Learning Boards are to convene community fora. These would give a mechanism for the election of community education representatives to the Boards. They should, therefore, be established as a priority to ensure adequate representation.

It is also important to note that not all groups active in the community and voluntary sector are active in the area of community education provision. It will be important to ensure that groups participating in a representative role have a clear understanding of community education principles and practices in order that they may enhance the functioning of the Boards.

Establishing and Hosting the Boards

The Local Adult Learning Boards will be established within the provisions of Section 21 of the Vocational Education Act (1930), as statutory sub-committees of the VEC. This will require that the amending VEC legislation currently being

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processed should abolish the existing restraints that limit the size of a sub-committee to 12. Under Section 21(5) of the 1930 Act, the Minister will approve arrangements for the VECs to dispense with the requirements under which all acts of the Local Adult Learning Boards require the confirmation of the VEC committee. This will enable the Local Adult Learning Boards to act as autonomous sub-committees which are administratively hosted by the VEC, and where the VEC also provides a technical service as an employer of additional staff appointed to the Boards. The Boards will have authority to make decisions on the deployment of resources within each region in regard to designated programmes within the further education sector accordance with:

- the national standards prescribed by the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland;
- the standards and guidelines for good practice and the national policies prescribed by the National Adult Learning Council;
- the framework for accountability, provision, policy, quality and resources set out by the Department of Education and Science.

The principles that should underpin the operation of the Boards will be as set out in the Green Paper:

- Area-based planning;
- Social Inclusion and Community Development;
- Access, Quality, Relevance and Progression;
- Partnership;
- Integration;
- Information;
- Flexibility;
- Voluntary effort;
- Devolved authority.

In addition, Local Adult Learning Boards will be required to ensure parity of esteem between the different interest groups, and that each member of the Board has full and equal status. The Area Education Officers/Adult Education Officers will be ex-officio members of the Local Adult Learning Boards. The Chief Executive Officer of the VEC may attend ex-officio any meeting of the Local Adult Learning Board. The remit of the CEO as Accounting Officer will extend to the work of the Local Adult Learning Boards.

The term of office of the Boards will be 3 years duration or such periods as may be co-terminus with the life of the VEC. The Boards will be required to meet at least 4 times per year, and will convene extraordinary meetings when the need arises.

The Members of the Board shall, at their first meeting, elect one of their members as Chairperson.

The quorum shall be 8 members.

A special meeting of the Board may be convened by any 10 members.

AONTAS advocated the retention of the local boards within the administrative structure of the VEC for purposes of accounting, administration and premises. We are satisfied that the changes with regard to the invocation of Section 21 of the VECs Act will lead to autonomy of decision-making and resourcing.

Community Fora

It is essential that democratic and accountable processes are put in place to enable the full range of local providers to play a role in the development of area plans and to inform ongoing policy and practice in Adult Education. Therefore, the **Local Adult Learning Boards will be required to formally convene local community fora through which the views of a wide range of interest can be channelled.** The fora should be convened by way of public meetings to which all interest groups with a role in Adult Education should be invited. This should include schools, Community and Adult Education groups, youth, adult literacy, welfare, health, employment centres, and training agencies. Appropriate networks should also be established where necessary through which:

- nominations can be made for membership of the Local Adult Learning Boards;
- the needs of specific groups such as Travellers and people with disabilities can be progressed.

AONTAS would like clarification on the nomination process for the community education sector to the Local Adult Learning Boards. Membership of the committee is stated to include four representative of the community and voluntary sector nominated by the Community Pillar. This statement directly conflicts with the stated role of the community fora. AONTAS' option of preference would rest with the use of community for a as a nomination route which has clearly identifiable mechanisms for accountability to the sector. Clarification on this issue is immediately necessary.

Funding

It is envisaged that **existing services** which are currently the remit of the VEC, or of individual schools, will continue to be funded on that basis into the future, but that the Local Adult Learning Boards, will, when they are established, have a key role in determining the priorities for:

deployment of funds under the Community Education budget;

- allocation of resources under the Special Initiatives for Disadvantaged Adults Scheme;
- determination of priorities for expansion of places under the Back to Education Initiative;

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- over-seeing of the Adult Educational Guidance Service as it emerges.

Funding will be allocated to the **relevant providers** on the basis of an annual area plan submitted by the Board to the Department of Education and Science. For Example, staff/funds will be allocated to individual schools or VECs in line with existing practice and, in the case of over-arching services such as guidance, staff development, SPIDAS and community education, funds will be allocated to the VECs on a technical basis. They will then be deployed locally in accordance with the recommendations of the Local Adult Learning Boards. The VECs will provide accounting and technical services to the Local Adult Learning Boards.

Local Adult Learning Boards will be required to submit an annual report for each year ended 31 December, and provide a copy to the VEC, a copy to the National Adult Learning Council and a copy to the Department of Education and Science. This should document the overall provision by programme in the area, provide a profile of participants, and report on the key developments. In addition, expenditure of the Board should be included under a separate heading in the monthly returns of expenditure made by the VEC to the Department on an ongoing basis. The Local Adult Learning Boards will also co-ordinate the provision of performance indicators on a quarterly basis on the delivery of services in their areas.

The VECs will be allocated funds to support the networking and operational costs of the Local Adult Learning Boards.

AONTAS believes that the Local Adult Learning Boards should submit their area-based plan to the National Adult Learning Council for approval, as well as the Department of Education and Science. In the White Paper as it currently stands, there is not even provision for the NALC to receive a copy of the plan, yet the LALB is accountable to the NALC for its actions on the basis of its plan. This is an anomaly that must be clarified. Furthermore, AONTAS believe that local structures should be accountable to national structures which, in turn, report to their funders on their operations. To cut the National Adult Learning Council out of this equation would render the adult education service's core body powerless in relation to ensuring that best practice is a measurable requirement in the local education plans.

Adult Education Organisers

Currently there are 43 Adult Education Organisers throughout the country. The Government now proposes to appoint a further 35 in the context of the additional work arising from the planned expansion of provision, the role of the Local Adult Learning Boards, and of promoting an increased role for community and comprehensive and secondary school sectors in providing for adult learning.

Of these, 33 will be appointed to the Local Adult Learning Boards on a flexible needs basis, to be deployed in accordance with the priorities identified by the

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Boards. At local level, there will be a particular need to convene local networks of secondary and Community and Comprehensive schools to promote, support and develop their role in adult education provision, and develop good linkages with the other stakeholders and providers in the area. Arrangements for nomination of representatives from the secondary and the community and comprehensive schools sector onto Local Adult Learning Boards will also stem from this process.

Two of the additional Adult Education Organisers will be assigned to the National Adult Learning Council. A particular part of their remit will be to play a national co-ordinating role in networking community, comprehensive and secondary schools and in ensuring a democratic and streamlined framework for representation of these sectors in the work of the Local Adult Learning Boards and that of NALC. Networking in national fora, co-ordination of policy inputs and responses in the field of Adult Education, promoting and supporting an increased role for these sectors in adult learning, organisation of appropriate staff development programmes, and close collaboration with the relevant management bodies will be an important part of this process. The national co-ordinators will report to the National Adult Learning Council, and their priorities and work programme will be agreed jointly by the Department and the Council in discussion with the relevant management bodies.

A key function of the local AEOs will be to support and develop the role of schools as providers of Adult Education, and to work closely with other community interests to ensure an integrated approach in the delivery of Adult Education and training. Such interests will include VECs, FAS, Area Partnerships, libraries, youth, community and voluntary sector groups, employers, County/City Development Boards, health and welfare interests and employment services. They will also be asked to work explicitly with the County Library system towards enabling the realisation of the vast potential of this system as a vehicle for accessible learning opportunities countrywide. The key objective is to co-ordinate the work of education providers with their counterparts in the other sectors in promoting an integrated area-based approach to the development and implementation of an Adult Education plan within their geographic areas.

The operation of the Local Adult Learning Boards will be evaluated after a 3-year development phase to assess its effectiveness and make recommendations as to how an integrated strategy can best be enhanced for the future development of the sector.

County/City Development Boards
The Local Adult Learning Boards will have a key role to play in ensuring a co-ordinated area-based input in respect of Adult Education into the strategic plans to be developed by the County/City Development Boards.

Staffing of VECs
The growth of activity under Adult Literacy and Adult Education generally, the expansion of the Back to Education Initiative, the development of supporting

services such as guidance and childcare, the increase in youthwork activity, participation in Area-Based Partnerships, County/City Development Boards and the development of integrated approaches have all raised fundamental issues in relation to professional and administrative staffing levels in VECs. Needs in this area will be assessed as part of a comprehensive review which is to begin shortly.

Ultimately, for Local Adult Learning Boards to be effective, they will need to have access to a range of supports which include guidance, programme and staff development, technical support, literacy and community education facilitation staff, working in each area as part of an Adult Education team. This issue will be progressed in the light of the outcomes of the review mentioned above.

Monitoring and Evaluation

The developments outlined in this Paper will be subject to ongoing monitoring and evaluation through:

- the social partnership fora and reporting arrangements underpinning the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness;
- the evaluation and monitoring arrangements governing the programmes set out in the *National Development Plan 2000 - 2006* and EU-aided Operational Programmes. These include formal six-monthly written progress reports, multi-agency monitoring committees, performance indicators setting out outputs and outcomes, and formal evaluation studies, thematic assessments, and mid-term and programmatic reviews;
- the work of the Department's Inspectorate in evaluating the quality and effectiveness of education services generally;
- the reporting and quality assurance processes of the various agencies and institutions which have a role in providing adult education or supporting services. A critical part of this process is the promotion across the system of a culture of team planning, self-appraisal, review and adaptation, under which the quality of education continues to evolve and improve on an ongoing basis in line with changing needs.

In addition, an over-arching evaluation study of developments and progress in promoting the Adult Education dimension of lifelong learning will be undertaken three years after the new structures proposed in this Chapter have been established. The study will also assess progress across all areas of the sector, including Further and Third-level education, quality assurance, staff development, certification and assessment, inter-agency linkages and structures, and development of supporting services.

Conclusion

AONTAS welcomes the publication of the White Paper and the proposals, recommendations and initiatives contained in it. We are pleased to have played a role in the formulation of the White Paper and are particularly struck by the manner in which the concerns of our members, as outlined in Making and Impact, have been addressed in it.

We are concerned, however, that the plans for the adult education service outlined in the White Paper should be implemented as quickly as possible, in particular the establishment of the NALC. We believe that it is imperative to establish working groups and conduct basic groundwork, such as feasibility studies, interdepartmental work and preliminary research, as a priority. There is no reason for this work to wait for the establishment of the structures outlined in the White Paper and it will provide detailed information of benefit to the new bodies when they convene.

AONTAS will monitor the implementation and legislative phases which follow the publication of government policy documents to ensure that the policy initiatives contained in the White Paper are effected to the benefit of our members in particular, and adult education generally. We will also lobby for those changes we feel will be necessary to ensure a responsive service capable of catering for the needs of all adults.

AONTAS is fully committed to working within the new adult education service and developing its services in line with the needs of our members. We look forward to a fruitful time for the adult education service in Ireland and for the development of new opportunities for those wishing to engage with it.

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